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SUBJECT: GOA BELIEVES FERRERO-WALDNER COULD WIN UNESCO RACE

REF: PARIS FR 01137

¶1. (SBU) MFA SecGen Kyrle told the Ambassador August 27 that he does not believe Egyptian Culture Minister Farouk Hosni will draw enough votes to win the race for the UNESCO Director General position on the first ballot. Kyrle said he expects Austria's Benita Ferrero-Waldner to finish second to Hosni in the first round, and believes she has a good chance to surpass him in a subsequent ballot. Several of the other candidates are likely to drop out along the way, and some of their supporters will then back Ferrero-Waldner, he predicted. EU member states have discussed the UNESCO election informally, and will address the issue of what to do after the first round if Hosni fails to secure the position, he said. At a reception to introduce Ferrero-Waldner to diplomatic representatives in Vienna, Ferrero-Waldner told Ambassador and DCM that she expects EU foreign ministers to discuss and agree on an EU-endorsed candidate at their next informal "Gymnich-format" meeting. She expressed optimism about her prospects. The French Charge, who formerly served in Cairo, told us that President Sarkozy had committed to Hosni in an unguarded moment and Paris was now looking at how to handle the situation. The French felt Hosni would be problematic for UNESCO and the Charge added Hosni was known for being corrupt "even in Egypt" and did not have a clue about management.

¶2. (SBU) Kyrle, in his meeting with the Ambassador, maintained that Ferrero-Waldner's experience as EU Commissioner for External Affairs provides an ideal background for the UNESCO post. As EU Commissioner, Ferrero-Waldner has been heavily involved in intercultural and inter-religious dialogue; she played a leading role, for example, in lowering tensions caused by the controversy over the 2005 publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed, he said. Much of her work has also been focused on improving education in the developing world -- a key element in promoting social justice, and directly related to UNESCO's cultural mission, he said. Moreover, he added, Ferrero-Waldner oversees a workforce of more than 3,500 people, demonstrating that she has the managerial skills to run a large organization. The Ambassador replied that the U.S. is not officially endorsing any candidates, but considers Ferrero-Waldner to be among the well-qualified contenders.

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